

Baltimore Sun
20 March 1986ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1A

Reagan offers a compromise on 'contra' aid

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WASHINGTON — In an eleventh-hour bid for House votes to support aid to the "contra" rebels of Nicaragua, the White House offered yesterday to seek diplomatic solutions to the Central American conflict while delaying the release of most of the aid for 90 days.

The administration proposal to delay release of all but \$25 million of the \$100 million that the president has requested is in fact merely a restatement of provisions already contained in the legislation on which the House is scheduled to vote today. Nevertheless, yesterday's White House proposal did mark the first strong linkage between aid to the rebels and a new, serious effort to achieve a peaceful settlement.

Meanwhile, House Democratic leaders, struggling to hold on to what they conceded was a "narrowing," slim margin of votes opposing the president's aid request, countered with conciliatory steps toward moderates in their own party.

If the president's aid request is defeated on a vote today, House leaders offered to renew the issue April 15 and permit party moderates to submit their own compromise aid plan as part of an emergency supplemental spending bill.

As debate on the aid issue began in the House yesterday, what effect the counterproposals would have on today's ballot was unclear, but both sides expected the vote to be very close.

"It has narrowed very slightly and we are still ahead," House Majority Whip Thomas S. Foley, D-Wash., said of the margin against the presi-

dent's plan.

"We have not got it locked up," House Minority Leader Robert H. Michel, R-Ill., said of a vote supporting the president. Mr. Michel was distressed that the administration had made the last-minute compromise offer after saying earlier there would be none, and he said there was no assurance that the offer would turn around enough votes for the president.

But Larry M. Speakes, the White House spokesman, said: "We are very, very close to achieving passage on this." Late last night, a senior administration official said the president's position was two or three votes short of approval.

Under the rules for the ballot, only a yes or no vote on the original request for \$70 million in military aid and \$30 million in humanitarian aid will be conducted today. The administration's compromise offer of a 90-day delay was contained in a draft executive order that would be separate from the pending aid legislation and would be signed if the aid request is approved by Congress.

According to a copy of the draft order obtained at the Capitol, for 90 days the administration would agree to limit military aid to the rebels to weapons for "defense against air attacks," such as surface-to-air missiles, and military-related training.

Mr. Speakes said the president would agree to release \$25 million immediately to the "contras" for both humanitarian and military purposes during the 90-day period. The original aid request also specified that only 25 percent of the funds, or \$25 million, would be released in the first 90 days. Mr. Speakes said that the administration would be free to divide the initial funds as it saw fit for military and humanitarian purposes.

In a
Congress

to Capitol Hill last night, the president pledged as part of the proposed order, "I will not augment this \$100 million through the use of CIA or any other funds that have not been approved by Congress for this purpose."

The order also proposed releasing \$2 million to help promote the Contadora regional peace process.

During the 90 day-period, the president would send his special envoy, Philip C. Habib, on an "urgent mission" to meet with Central American leaders and urge the Nicaraguan government to "initiate a national dialogue" with all dissident factions, according to the order.

In addition, the plan calls for the Sandinista government to agree to a cease-fire during the 90-day period, ending a state of emergency and permitting free speech and assembly.

The president would name a five-member commission "to monitor Nicaragua's responsiveness to negotiations," Mr. Speakes said. But "it would ultimately be decided by the president" if talks were not progressing and the rest of the "contra" aid should be released, Mr. Speakes said.

The plan does not specifically provide for a second vote by Congress to release the remaining funds, but Mr. Speakes said Congress would have 15 days in which to enact a resolution disapproving of the release of the money. The president could veto that measure, but Congress could override a veto by a two-thirds vote in each chamber.

Mr. Speakes said the compromise plan was "a good faith effort to meet the concerns of those on the Hill."

The compromise emerged from administration talks late Tuesday and throughout the day yesterday with Representatives Rod Chandler, R-Wash., and Dave McCurdy, D-Okla. While Mr. Chandler was satisfied with the compromise, Mr. McCurdy was not.

Mr. McCurdy, who engineered a contra aid compromise last year, joined with House Democratic leaders yesterday in opposing the executive order and said he and other moderate Democrats would push their own binding, legislative alternative April 15 if the administration plan is rejected today.

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NEW YORK TIMES
20 March 1986

Congress

Words, Words and More Words on Nicaragua

By **ROBERT PEAR**

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 19 — All over Capitol Hill, telephones were ringing with calls from constituents.

Philip C. Habib, President Reagan's special diplomatic envoy, was lobbying in the corridors, trying to capture a few swing votes.

And on the floor of the House, there was impassioned debate, as is usual when the House takes up a momentous issue, in this case one that Mr. Reagan has described as a historic test of his Presidency.

The issue is the Reagan proposal to provide \$100 million worth of aid to the rebels in Nicaragua. Today was the first day of debate; on Thursday comes the vote.

Representative Bill McCollum, a Florida Republican, warned his colleagues that a vote against the aid package was "a vote for Communism in Central America."

Opponents argued that a vote against the aid package was not a vote for Daniel Ortega Saavedra, the President of Nicaragua, or for other Sandinista leaders.

A Hawk Will Vote Against

Representative Tim Valentine, a conservative North Carolina Democrat, describes himself as "a genuine certified 100 percent hawk" who supported the American invasion of Grenada in 1983 and knows full well that the airwaves in his district now bristle with radio commercials urging him to support the aid plan.

But Mr. Valentine plans to vote against the President's request.

"It would just be pumping money down a sinkhole," he said in an interview. "I try to find ways to support my President. But I don't like giving away money to a bunch of illiterate farmers and cutthroats in Nicaragua when we can't find money to pay for rural electrification or to help the struggling textile industry in the United States."

Representative Henry J. Hyde, Republican of Illinois, is a proponent of the aid package. He expressed strong irritation with colleagues who criticized the anti-Communist rebels.

"Our friends on the left have never met an anti-Communist they liked," he said, turning to the Democrats. "As the refugees stream north, history is going to assign you folks the role of pallbearers at the funeral of freedom in Central America."

For all the passion spent in today's oratory, Mr. Hyde said, "I don't expect this debate to change a single vote."

Because the House has often voted on various proposals to provide or to

restrict aid to the rebels, perhaps 375 of the 435 members have firmly established positions on the issue.

The stakes in the vote to be taken Thursday were described in ever starker terms as the debate wore on, terms that eventually spanned not just borders but entire oceans.

In a letter to their colleagues, a group of seven conservative Republican House members, among them Jack F. Kemp of upstate New York, Newt Gingrich of Georgia, Vin Weber of Minnesota and Trent Lott of Mississippi, the minority whip, said that just as a Cuban armored regiment fought against Israel on the Syrian front in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, so "Nicaraguans will soon be helping their brothers in arms in Libya and Iran to achieve their stated goal of defeating Israel."

For this reason, they warned, the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua poses a potential threat not just to the United States but also to Israel. The presence of a Cuban armored regiment in Syria has not been generally noted in accounts of the 1973 war, but David G. Shedd, press secretary to Mr. Gingrich, said the information had been confirmed by intelligence

officials in the Administration.

Then there were more down-to-earth, simpler approaches to the issue.

Representative Stewart B. McKinney, a Connecticut Republican, said that he opposed aid to the rebels, but that his wife, Lucie, was telling him, "You better vote with the President or you will be in terrible trouble."

"She is a liberated woman," Mr. McKinney said. "She's got her own opinion on everything." On this issue, he said, she is hearing from friends in Westport, Fairfield and Stamford, Conn., who rarely offer political advice but feel strongly that the United States should assist the rebels, known as the contras.

"This is a very gutty, emotional issue," Mr. McKinney concluded.

As for Mr. Habib, the Presidential envoy, his pitch on Capitol Hill was said to have been that leaders of countries near Nicaragua had told him privately on his recent visit to the region that they supported Mr. Reagan's effort to put pressure on the Sandinista regime but could not openly declare their support.

How many votes that swung was anybody's guess. But as Representa-

tive Ed Zschau, a California Republican, saw things, Mr. Habib had been an effective advocate for the President's position.

Adding to the political passion in the debate today was the knowledge that the issue of aid to the contras might figure prominently in many Congressional elections this fall.

The National Conservative Political Action Committee is planning "independent expenditure campaigns" to publicize the voting records of 33 members who have opposed aid to the rebels.

The 33 include Representative Jim Leach of Iowa, a leading Republican critic of the President's policy in Nicaragua.

"Nicipac announced a massive fund-raising drive and has targeted me," Mr. Leach said. "It's a bit coercive, but my district is more concerned about problems in the central part of North America than in the central part of Latin America."

Remembering Vietnam

Like the Congressional election, analogies to Vietnam also pervaded the debate on Nicaragua. Representative Bob Dornan, a California Republican, saw economic decay in both Managua and Hanoi. Nicaragua, like Vietnam, keeps thousands of political prisoners, he said.

But the Speaker of the House, Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., Democrat of Massachusetts, saw another analogy.

"I voted for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution," he said, referring to the 1964 measure that opened the way to increased American military involvement in Vietnam. "In my view, I did the wrong thing. Tomorrow we face another Tonkin Gulf vote. I can see us getting into a war down there in Nicaragua."

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-AWASHINGTON TIMES
20 February 1986

Weinberger, Shultz urge help for freedom fighters

By James Morrison
And Lucy Keyser
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, warning that the Marxist rulers of Nicaragua are "moving quickly, with Soviet bloc and Cuban help, to consolidate their totalitarian power," urged Congress yesterday to approve a resumption of military aid to the anti-communist guerrillas.

"Should they achieve this [consolidation]," he warned, "we could confront a second Cuba in this hemisphere, this time on the Central America mainland."

Mr. Weinberger told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that military aid to the rebels could allow them to deal with a large Sandinista offensive.

Congress suspended military aid to the guerrillas, known as the Con-

tras, in 1984 but has approved \$27 million in humanitarian aid.

Secretary of State George Shultz also was on Capitol Hill yesterday with a call to Congress to "support, not abandon, the democratic resistance within Nicaragua."

"The most immediate danger to democracy in Central America is the assault on it from Communist Nicaragua, aided by Cuba and the Soviet Union," he told the Senate Budget Committee.

Said Mr. Weinberger: "With appropriate, predictable amounts of aid, they could bring about a drastic change in behavior on the part of the Nicaraguan government."

"But should the Contras be funded by further cuts in the domestic program?" asked Rep. Ted Weiss, New York Democrat.

"There are supplementals in the president's budget which go towards the Contras," Mr. Weinberger said. "There's no need for further domestic cuts."

"So we put \$100 million in, what do we see in the next six months or a year?" asked Rep. Sam Gejdenson, Connecticut Democrat. "Don't they [Soviets and Cubans] just ante up every time we ante up? Don't you think they'll just keep sending in more guns?"

"They will if there is no visible penalty for doing that," Mr. Weinberger said. "A strong, well-led force that receives aid can make a very large difference."

"To prevent another Soviet beachhead is worth it," said Rep. Henry J. Hyde, Illinois Republican.

Mr. Shultz and Mr. Weinberger also urged Congress not to cut off aid to the Philippines, as the Senate condemned the disputed re-election of Ferdinand Marcos.

"I would counsel care and at least a little patience. We have sent them a very strong signal," Mr. Shultz told the Senate Budget Committee. "We want to stay connected with the Philippines. We don't want to walk away from it."

Mr. Weinberger said a cutoff of military aid to the Philippines would only help the communist insurgency waged by the New People's Army.

"In the end, the only real beneficiary of a delayed or diminished military aid program would be the New People's Army, and that is an outcome which we cannot support," Mr. Weinberger said.

Senate Budget Committee member Jim Sasser, Tennessee Democrat, who introduced a bill Tuesday to halt U.S. aid to the Philippines, told Mr. Shultz, "If we don't pull the plug on President Marcos, the Philippine people are going to pull the plug on the United States and its military bases."

Mr. Sasser's bill would affect military and economic aid to the Philippines, a key U.S. ally in the Pacific and the home of the two largest American military bases outside the United States.

His legislation would halt up to \$180 million of more than \$240 million in U.S. aid this year. The rest of the money has already been obligated to the Philippines.

Mr. Shultz noted that President Reagan has already condemned the Feb. 7 Philippine presidential election for widespread fraud and violence and has sent special envoy Philip Habib to the Philippines to talk "to all parties."

"We are in the process of assessing the situation," Mr. Shultz said. "I think we have to remember that this is, essentially, first a Philippine problem, and we want to see first how the Philippines are going to handle it."

"But you're right. We have a big stake there. We have a stake in freedom. We have a stake in democracy. Let's put that first, over and above the bases."

The Senate approved a non-binding resolution, 85-9, declaring that the Philippine election was "marked by such widespread fraud that [it] cannot be considered a fair reflection of the will of the people of the Philippines."

Sponsored by Majority Leader Robert Dole of Kansas and Minority Leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia, the resolution said the Philippine balloting "was plagued by widespread fraud at all levels."

"America's interests are best served in the Philippines by a government that has a popular mandate," the resolution added.

Mr. Shultz is seeking nearly \$234 million for the Philippines for the 1987 fiscal year, a decrease from current aid and the product of a budget in which "every attempt was made to economize."

In the first public hearing on his proposed spending package, the Senate Budget Committee warned Mr. Shultz that his proposals might face the ax under the Gramm-Rudman deficit-reduction plan, which dictates that the federal deficit be cut to \$144 billion in fiscal '87.

Mr. Shultz is seeking a \$2.1 billion increase in a proposed \$22.6 billion State Department budget. The proposal includes \$1.4 billion as the first installment in a five-year, \$4.4 billion plan to protect diplomatic missions from terrorism and to build new embassies in high-risk countries.

"You're going to be fortunate if there is a freeze and not a 12 percent cut" in the State Department budget proposal, Committee Chairman Peter Domenici of New Mexico told Mr. Shultz.

Although they warned him of impending budget cuts, committee members generally supported his proposals, especially his diplomatic security plan.

"Embassy security is a responsibility of this country. This fellow is with you," New York Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan said.